

Coins

The 'wheaties' collectors face a minor harvest

By Roger Boye

MORE QUESTIONS from Tribune readers are answered in this week's column.

Q—I noticed at a coin store that Lincoln cents made in the 1950s were on sale for 5 cents each. The salesman called them "wheaties." What's so special about coins that are less than 30 years old? — P.K., Chicago

A—Lincoln cents made from 1909 to 1958 are often dubbed "wheaties" because they bear the design of two ears of wheat on the tails side. The coins are seldom found in circulation anymore, and even the dates with high mintages are

slowly becoming minor collectors' items.

Although the sales price you saw is rather typical, most coin dealers own a big supply of common-date wheat cents. Collectors who want to unload a small hoard may have a hard time finding a buyer.

Q—Some coin advertisers in The Tribune use letters such as "VG," "VF," and "BU." What do the letters mean? — E.T., Chicago

A—They are common collector abbreviations that denote the condition of a coin. "VG" means "very good condition," "VF" is "very fine," and "BU" is "brilliant uncirculated."

Q—I received my five 1979 proof sets from the mint. I thought they were supposed to be some-

thing special, but the hinges were broken on all five plastic cases. What can I do? — A.S., Schiller Park

A—Proof sets damaged in shipment can be returned for replacement. Write the Bureau of the Mint (55 Mint St., San Francisco, Cal. 94175) and ask for a free postage-paid label to use in mailing your sets. The new sets should arrive about seven weeks after the mint receives the damaged ones.

Also, include your customer order number in all correspondence. The number is printed near your address on the front side of the proof-set package.

Q—My great-grandfather put a hole in a 1904

silver dollar so he could wear the coin on a watch chain. What might the coin be worth today? — D.U., Oak Park

A—Most coins with holes have little collector value. Likewise, nicks, scratches, or gouges make coins less desirable to collectors.

Q—Are worn \$2 bills of series 1963 worth saving? They carry the words "United States note." We pulled five of them out of circulation a few years ago. — Z.D., Algonquin

A—No, they are still too common among collectors. However, coin dealers sell uncirculated specimens of the series 1963 \$2 bill for about \$5.